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Programme planning

Ways in which the full implementation and the quality of mandated programmes and activities could be ensured and could be better assessed by and reported to Member States

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report responds to the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination that the Secretary-General be requested to further explore ways in which the full implementation of mandates could be ensured and better assessed according to the request in General Assembly resolution 53/207 of 18 December 1998. It draws from the findings and conclusions contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/55/73) on the need to strengthen programme performance management and monitoring within departments and offices and to further develop the qualitative assessments reflected for the first time in the 1998-1999 report. The report proposes that the performance report for the biennium 2000-2001 also include, in addition to the analysis of output implementation and the qualitative assessment provided in the programme performance report for 1998-1999, reporting on the attainment of the expected accomplishments set out in the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. The purpose of the recommendation is to enhance the use of the performance report during consideration of future programme budgets by the Committee.

* A/55/50.

** The formulation of the proposed approach described in the present report was contingent on completion of the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/55/73). Consequently, the report was delayed.

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I. Introduction

1. In part V of its resolution 53/207 of 18 December 1998, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals for consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-ninth session on ways in which the full implementation and the quality of mandated programmes and activities could be ensured and could be better assessed and reported to Member States. The report of the Secretary-General (A/54/117) prepared in response to that request was considered by the Committee at its thirty-ninth session (New York, 7 June to 2 July 1999). The report proposed three options for improving the assessment of programme implementation.

2. The first option related to the programme performance review process and proposed that the relevant sectoral, functional and regional intergovernmental bodies that oversaw each programme review and assess the quality of performance of the respective programme. The reasoning was that, as those bodies conducted the primary level of review and assessment of the proposed medium-term plans and work programmes, the end-of-biennium review of the substance and effectiveness of programme implementation could best be carried out by the same legislative body. Their views and recommendations would then be incorporated into the Secretariat's programme performance report to be submitted to the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

3. The second option was intended to address the timing and format of such a review to allow the specialized intergovernmental bodies and the Committee to have before them information on both past performance and future proposals when they considered the succeeding programme budget. This was based on the fact that the programme performance report is currently submitted six months after the programme budget of the following biennium is approved.

4. The third option would require the specification of outcomes in the programme budget proposals in order to identify expected accomplishments for the activities of each subprogramme and to identify the outputs and activities required to achieve those outcomes.

5. After reviewing the report, the Committee recommended that the Secretary-General be requested to further explore ways in which the full implementation of mandates could be ensured and better assessed according to the request in resolution 53/207, taking into account the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8) and budgetary procedures, and giving due consideration to the views of Member States, and report thereon to the Committee at its fortieth session.[1] The General Assembly endorsed the Committee's recommendations in its resolution 54/236 of 23 December 1999.

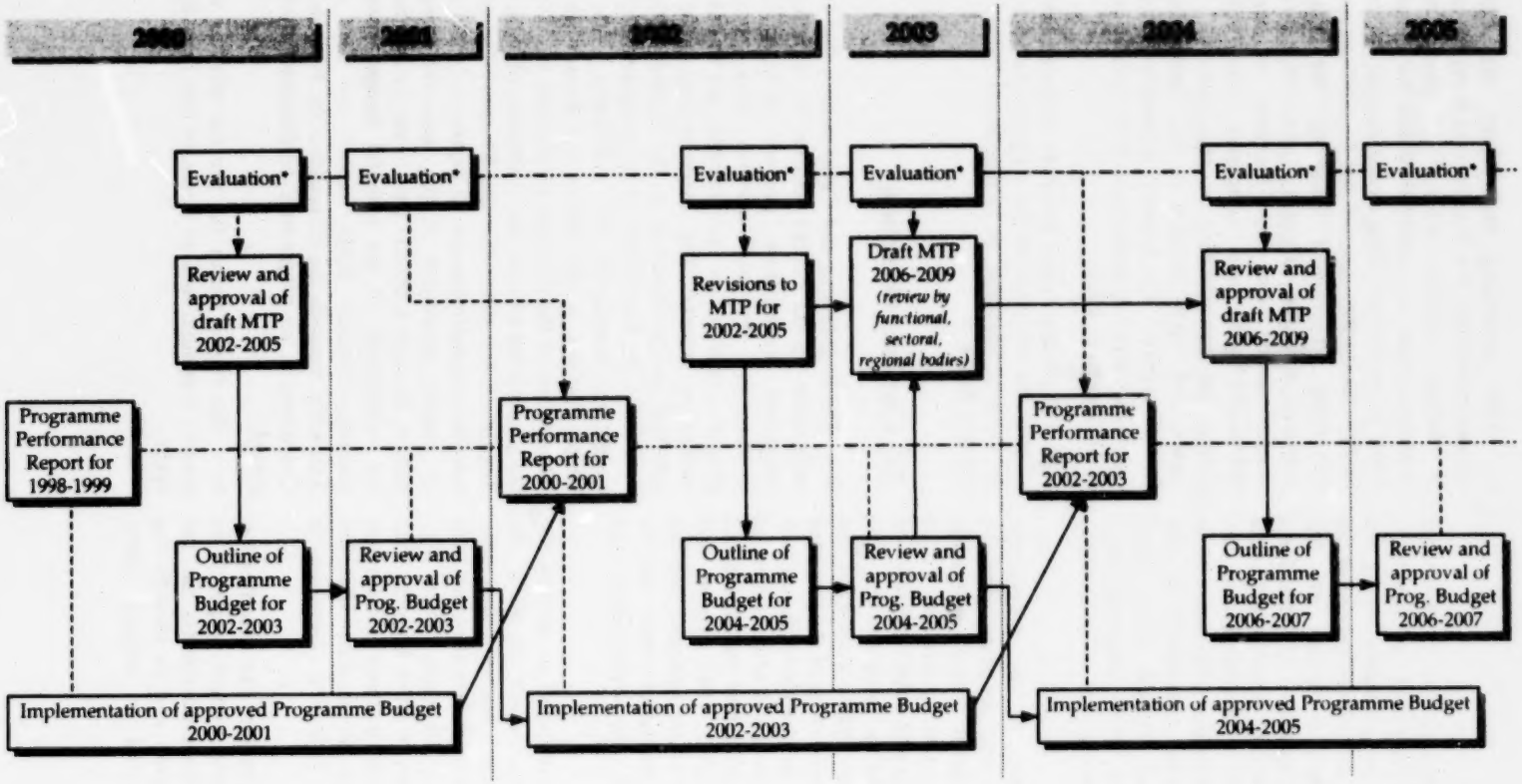
6. The present report has been prepared taking into account the revisions to the Regulations approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 53/207 and the relevant Rules.

II. Current situation

7. The Regulations and Rules require that activities undertaken by the United Nations be submitted to an integrated management process reflected in four instruments: the medium-term plan, programme budgets, reports on programme performance and evaluation reports. The medium-term plan is the principal policy directive of the United Nations and constitutes the foundation of the programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation cycle of the United Nations. It also serves as a framework for the formulation of the biennial programme budgets within the plan period and for the evaluation of programmes. Regulation 6.1 states that the Secretary-General shall monitor accomplishments, as measured by the delivery of outputs scheduled in the approved programme budget, through a central unit in the Secretariat. After the completion of the biennial budget period, the Secretary-General shall report to the General Assembly, through the Committee for Programme and Coordination, on programme performance during that period.

8. The figure shows the process starting with the present biennium and in terms of the next four-year cycle.

Work of the Committee for Programme and Coordination as it relates to the programme planning, budgeting, evaluation and monitoring cycle


2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
Evaluation*
Evaluation*
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Evaluation*
Evaluation*
Evaluation*
Review and approval of draft MTP 2002-2005
Revisions to MTP for 2002-2005
Draft MTP 2006-2009 (review by functional, sectoral, regional bodies)
Review and approval of draft MTP 2006-2009
Programme Performance Report for 1998-1999
Programme Performance Report for 2000-2001
Programme Performance Report for 2002-2003
Outline of Programme Budget for 2002-2003
Review and approval of Prog. Budget 2002-2003
Outline of Programme Budget for 2004-2005
Review and approval of Prog. Budget 2004-2005
Outline of Programme Budget for 2006-2007
Review and approval of Prog. Budget 2006-2007
Implementation of approved Programme Budget 2000-2001
Implementation of approved Programme Budget 2002-2003
Implementation of approved Programme Budget 2004-2005

→ Direct linkage between components

----- Information material assisting consideration and review

—·—·— Sequential parts of process

* Programmes evaluated as decided by CPC

9. The programme performance report constitutes one of the Secretariat's mechanisms of accountability to the General Assembly in that it provides Member States with an overall view of the extent to which commitments in the biennial programme budgets have been met. To enhance its usefulness, the programme performance report should also strengthen the linkage of components in the planning cycle, namely, successive planning processes, programme budgeting, monitoring[2] and evaluation.

10. The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/207, emphasized two key requirements: ways in which full implementation could be ensured and the quality of mandated programmes could be better assessed. Legislative mandates are translated into programmes and subprogrammes in the medium-term plan. Regulation 4.5 states that each programme shall contain a narrative identifying the mandates that provide overall direction for the programme, and each subprogramme shall contain a narrative reflecting *all mandated activities* and identifying objectives and accomplishments during the plan period [emphasis added]. In this context, full implementation would mean that the objectives as identified were achieved within the four-year period of the medium-term plan.

11. The biennial programme budget is intended to address the objectives set forth in the medium-term plan. To that end, new rule 105.2 states explicitly that no activity or output shall be included in the proposed programme budget unless it is clearly in implementation of the medium-term plan strategy and likely to help to achieve the plan objectives, or it is in implementation of legislation passed subsequent to the approval or revision of the plan. Full implementation in a given biennium thus refers to the extent to which budgeted outputs and services delivered led to the realization of the mandated objectives. Thus, in the implementation of the programme of work, programme managers are obligated to ensure the optimum utilization of the resources allocated towards attainment of the stated objectives. This permits the action required to accommodate modifications made to the programme of work during the biennium, as introduced by the legislative bodies or by the Secretariat in response to emerging issues.

12. However, as highlighted in the review of the previous report, covering the biennium 1996-1997 (A/53/122), with the current format of performance reporting neither full implementation nor the quality of mandated outputs can be wholly determined or reflected. Performance has thus far been defined in terms of the production of reports and parliamentary documents, the substantive servicing of meetings and the like, focusing on the "means" (outputs) rather than "ends" (objectives) of a programme. To the extent that implementation of a mandated programme is expected to go beyond the production of outputs, or when a programme does not produce tangible outputs, the performance report can provide data on the implementation of outputs, but not on whether objectives were fully attained.

13. To comply with the request in section V, paragraph 10, of General Assembly resolution 53/207 that future performance reports should place more emphasis on qualitative analysis to reflect achievements in implementing programme activities, the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/55/73) provided qualitative assessments of programme performance by budget section. As stated in the report, in the absence of stated desirable quality goals in the 1998-1999 programme budget, it was not possible to determine the quality of programme performance against what might have been expected at the programme budget preparation stage. As an alternative, programme managers provided their own assessment as to how the outputs delivered contributed to the attainment of the stated objectives, e.g., the major benefits realized and lessons learned from internal and external evaluations. The assessments showed that reporting on achievements was feasible and that, had the required benchmarks been established at the programme budgeting stage, such reporting would have enabled the Committee to assess the extent to which the performance had met those achievements.

14. Under regulation 5.4, the programme narratives in the programme budget for 2000-2001 were required to set out, *inter alia*, accomplishments expected during the biennium. Accordingly, budget proposals for each section included expected accomplishments. In considering the programme budget, the Committee for Programme and Coordination expressed its appreciation for the improved format and noted the efforts of the Secretary-General to meet the new requirements of the revised Regulations and Rules. Subsequently, the General Assembly, at its fifty-fourth session, approved the programme budget in the format in which it was submitted.

15. The experience of the 1998-1999 performance reporting exercise underscored the continuing need to improve performance management, monitoring and reporting through further development of qualitative performance assessments and making computer-based monitoring systems a requirement Secretariat-wide in order to track progress made in the delivery of outputs. The report notes several actions the Secretariat needs to undertake, among which the need to review the timing, substance and impact of the performance report as a feedback mechanism for future programme planning and budgeting is of direct import to the present report.

III. Proposed approach

16. The qualitative assessments contained in the programme performance report represented a first step towards providing indicators of the achievement of objectives approved by Member States in the context of the resources approved in the programme budget. The clear articulation of expected accomplishments at the outset of a biennium, as was attempted in the programme budget for 2000-2001[3] and as has been proposed in the context of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005, would facilitate assessment by Member States of the effectiveness of the outputs in meeting the objectives of programmes. Systematic reporting on such measures would allow Member States at different levels of the intergovernmental machinery to appraise the relevance and usefulness of an organizational entity's work. However, as observed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001,[4] the statements of expected accomplishments required further refinement, as the first attempts were broad and general in nature and, as such, might be difficult to verify. The Advisory Committee further understood that such refinements would be made after guidance had been provided by the relevant intergovernmental bodies.

17. The Secretariat, taking into account the foregoing and in order to ensure more effective use of the programme performance report, would propose for the Committee's consideration that the following measures be undertaken with respect to the format and content as well as the timing of the report.

Format and content

18. In addition to the analysis of output implementation and the qualitative assessment provided in the 1998-1999 programme performance report, reporting on the attainment of the intended accomplishments spelled out in the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 would be included. When preparing their programme budget submissions, programme managers selected the accomplishments that would best meet their objectives. They would thus be requested to provide the relevant criteria for assessing the attainment of those accomplishments at an early stage of the performance reporting process for 2000-2001. For example, in the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs, one expected accomplishment was to achieve greater cooperation between the United Nations and other electoral assistance organizations. The reported strengthening of such cooperation could be used as an indicator of achievement. Further examples are provided in the annex showing how selected expected accomplishments included in the approved programme budget for 2000-2001 might be assessed and how performance against those expectations might be reported by subprogrammes in the programme budget.

19. It should be noted that, in general, the ability to define assessment criteria is determined to a large extent by the precision with which the expected accomplishments are expressed in the programme text. The experience gained during the biennium 2000-2001 would allow the Secretariat to improve the identification of expected accomplishments in future programme budgets, with particular emphasis on the benefits to end-users of activities and services delivered.

20. New rule 105.4 (a) (iii) supports the above. It states that expected accomplishments shall be formulated for each subprogramme and shall identify those benefits or changes expected to accrue to users or beneficiaries through the delivery of final outputs. They shall be in conformity with and lead to the fulfilment of the objectives established in the programmes and subprogrammes, and shall be expressed in terms that will facilitate the subsequent determination of whether the expectations have been met. Expected accomplishments shall be objective, feasible and pertinent to the nature of and work carried out by each subprogramme.

21. The performance report could also include a synopsis of the review of the quality of performance and the extent of implementation conducted by the relevant functional, sectoral and regional intergovernmental bodies. This would allow the Committee for Programme and Coordination to refer to the first-hand assessments of attainment of objectives carried out by the review bodies immediately concerned.

Timing

22. The present schedule for submission of the programme performance report would be maintained, but greater efforts should be made to utilize its findings for the consideration of future programme budgets.

23. The proposed approach would move performance reporting away from its current focus on the production of outputs to a focus on accomplishment. If the expected accomplishment were not achieved in full, the Committee (like the specialized bodies) would be in a position to request an explanation from the responsible programme manager. The Organization continues to move towards strengthening the accountability and responsibility of programme managers for the effective and timely delivery of their programmes of work and to attain the objectives proposed in medium-term plans and programme budgets. The assumption is that programme managers considered those objectives as achievable, having determined them at the beginning of the process, namely, in the medium-term plan. When the expected accomplishments are reported as having been fulfilled, the Committee and the specialized bodies would be in a position to determine the quality of performance in terms of the guiding objectives. Reporting on programme performance based on achievement of the projected accomplishments would have the additional benefit of assisting in strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives. Subsequently, the evaluation findings for given programmes should help to sharpen and make more realistic the expected accomplishments that would form the basis of performance monitoring.

24. The above does not imply elimination of the current reporting based on output, which needs to be continued for the outputs scheduled in the programme budget for 2000-2001. While the review of *obtained* as compared with *expected* accomplishments may be considered as meeting performance reporting requirements, quantitative accounting for completed outputs as an indication of the Organization's attainment of its objectives is still relevant. The two systems, quantitative and qualitative reporting, reinforce each other and provide a fuller picture.

IV. Conclusions and recommendation

25. The Committee for Programme and Coordination requested the Secretary-General to further explore ways in which the full implementation of mandates could be ensured and better assessed in the context of the biennial programme performance report. Towards that end, the present report proposes that:

(a) As recommended in the report of the Secretary-General on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1998-1999, programme managers be urged: (i) to use computerized monitoring systems for tracking the timely and effective implementation of their work; and (ii) to establish assessment criteria for measuring expected accomplishments;

(b) The performance report for the biennium 2000-2001 provide systematic reporting on the qualitative aspects of programme performance, building on the initial experience in the report for the biennium 1998-1999. This would include a presentation of indicators of the achievement of the expected accomplishments set out in the 2000-2001 programme budget.

26. While the programme performance report would continue to provide information on the delivery of programmed outputs, its main focus would be on the extent to which outputs implemented had led to the attainment of the expected accomplishments. The report would thus provide the Committee with substantive information to assist it in its consideration of future programme budgets.

27. It is recommended that the Committee for Programme and Coordination authorize the Secretary-General to present his report on programme performance for the biennium 2000-2001 in accordance with the approach described in section III of the present report and that it decide to review the procedure on the basis of that experience with a view to possibly utilizing it over the period of

the next medium-term plan, covering the period 2002-2005.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/54/16), para. 30.

[2] Findings in the programme performance report, such as an unusually high number of uncompleted outputs that might denote managerial weaknesses, may induce an inspection by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of a particular organizational entity.

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/54/6/Rev.1).

[4] Ibid., *Supplement No. 7* (A/54/7).

Annex

Suggested samples of programme performance assessments for the biennium 2000-2001

Programme subprogramme	*Accomplishments expected in 2000-2001[a] (as stated in the programme budget)*	*Possible assessment criteria*	*Possible examples of performance[b]*
Political affairs			
Security Council affairs	Completion of studies for the eleventh supplement to the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*	The eleventh supplement is published and used	Sales of the eleventh supplement reached *X* copies, *Global Governance*'s reviewer stated that it was the best supplement published to date and the supplement was cited in statements of *Y* per cent of the members of the Security Council
Peacekeeping operations			
Operations	Timely and economical liquidation of closed missions	Amount of time between final day of mission and completion of liquidation	The average time for closure of missions during the biennium was *X*
Legal affairs			
Custody, registration and publication of treaties	Substantial reduction or elimination of the historical backlog in the production of the United Nations *Treaty Series* and the United Nations *Treaty Series Cumulative Index*	Extent to which there is a backlog in production	During the biennium remaining backlogs were cleared and the *Series* is up to date as at 1 July 2001
Economic and social affairs			
Advancement of women	Increased compliance by States in their reporting obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	Reduction in the number of States that have not yet reported or are behind schedule in submitting reports	During the biennium, *X* States that had not submitted reports did so, and the average backlog in submitting reports declined to *Y* years
Global development trends, issues and policies	Identification of new international development goals	Agreement in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on new international development goals on the basis of recommendations made by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs	General Assembly adopted new international development goals that were substantially as recommended by the Department
Africa: New Agenda for Development			
Campaign for global awareness of the critical economic situation in Africa	Increased awareness in Africa and the international community of the nature of the critical economic and social situation in Africa and of the African and international efforts required for recovery and development, as well as of the major	Changes in media coverage, academic journals and government statements relating to the economic and social situation of Africa that cite United Nations sources	The number of citations in international media during the biennium of *Africa Recovery* or other United Nations information increased from *X* to *Y*

Programme subprogramme	*Accomplishments expected in 2000-2001[a] (as stated in the programme budget)*	*Possible assessment criteria*	*Possible examples of performance[b]*
	international and national initiatives and events that contribute to Africa's economic progress		
Trade and development			
Globalization and development	Identification and increased adoption of durable solutions to the debt problems of developing countries and to resource mobilization for least developed countries	The number of international and bilateral organizations that adopt durable solutions as recommended by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund adopted solutions that had been recommended by UNCTAD
International trade in goods and services and commodities	Further integration of developing countries, in particular the least developed among them, and countries with economies in transition, into the international trading system and increased participation of those countries in the multilateral trading system	The number of developing countries and countries with economies in transition that have joined multilateral trading organizations or have participated more actively in trade negotiations after having received UNCTAD advisory missions or participated in group training	*X* countries have measurably increased their participation in activities of the World Trade Organization following the receipt of UNCTAD advisory services or the participation of their trade ministry staff in UNCTAD training and expert groups
International drug control			
International drug control monitoring and policy-making	Proper worldwide balance between supply and demand for licit drugs achieved throughout the formulation of relevant recommendations to Governments	The extent to which Governments adopt and implement the recommendations of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)	*X* countries that produce licit drugs adopt and implement INCB recommendations regarding supply during the period
Economic and social development in Africa			
Harnessing information for development	Enhanced management of development information and adoption by Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) member States of appropriate technologies for building and disseminating development information databases	Extent to which member States utilize ECA recommendations on management and create development information databases in conformity with the recommendations	*X* countries in the region have created development information databases after staff participated in the ECA workshop on new database development technologies and on organization and management of development information, including dissemination on the Web and use of geographic information systems in statistical offices
Promoting the advancement of women	Raising awareness of decision makers and policy makers on the need to integrate the gender perspective into national budgetary processes	The extent to which a gender perspective is reported to have been integrated into national budgetary processes in conformity with ECA recommendations	*X* countries report having utilized a gender perspective in preparing their most recent national budgets, in general conformity with ECA recommendations
Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific			
Social development	Increased attention given by national policy and programme	Change in the number of countries adopting or modifying	*X* countries in the region made significant changes in their

Programme subprogramme	*Accomplishments expected in 2000-2001[a] (as stated in the programme budget)*	*Possible assessment criteria*	*Possible examples of performance[b]*
	personnel and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to emphasize the importance of promoting the rights and full participation in society of older persons	policies relating to the participation of older persons in line with recommendations of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)	national policies for older persons following ESCAP missions and meetings
Transport, communications, tourism and infrastructure development	Accession by a significant number of Asian countries to the conventions listed in ESCAP resolution 48/11	Number of Asian countries that have acceded	*X* countries have acceded to convention *Y* during the biennium
Public information			
Information services	Strengthened cooperation with international radio and television broadcasters for the coverage of United Nations activities	Increase in the amount and scope of coverage of United Nations activities by international media	During the biennium, the number of events that were given major coverage by international media increased from *X* to *Y*

[a] As stated in the programme budget as approved by the General Assembly.

[b] As measured at the end of the biennium and reported to the Committee for Programme and Coordination.